

Daily Times, 01 March 2006

Pakistan hunting Qaeda, Taliban

Pakistan is doing all it can in the US-led war on terror, President Gen Pervez Musharraf said on Tuesday, rejecting criticism that the government has not been aggressive in pursuing Taliban leaders in Pakistan. Gen Musharraf, in an interview with US television network ABC, also dismissed information on Taliban leaders given to Pakistan by Afghan President Hamid Karzai as "a waste of time". Asked if he was going after Osama Bin Laden aggressively enough, Musharraf said: "We are not using the army only to track down Osama. I mean, this kind of a misperception should be removed. We are using the army against Al Qaeda and Taliban." "Now in the process, if you get word on him, very good. But we are not certainly focusing entirely only on tracking Osama Bin Laden and (Ayman al-) Zawahri," he said. Musharraf said 80,000 troops were fighting Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters on the border with Afghanistan. But he said it was unknown whether Bin Laden was in Pakistan.

Reuters, 01 March 2006

Bin Laden tape aided re-election, says Bush

US President George W Bush said his 2004 re-election victory over Senator John Kerry was inadvertently aided by Osama bin Laden, who issued a taped diatribe against him the Friday before Americans went to the polls, The Examiner newspaper reported on Tuesday. Bush said there were "enormous amounts of discussion" inside his campaign about the 15-minute tape, which he called "an interesting entry by our enemy" into the presidential race. Bush's comments in the Washington newspaper were excerpts from the new book "Strategy" by Bill Sammon, a long-time White House correspondent. "What does it mean? Is it going to help? Is it going to hurt?" Bush told Sammon of the bin Laden tapes. "Anything that drops in at the end of a campaign that is not already decided creates all kinds of anxieties, because you're not sure of the effect." "I thought it was going to help," Bush said. "I thought it would help remind people that if bin Laden doesn't want Bush to be the president, something must be right with Bush."

Indian Express, 01 March 2006

N-deal hopes take off as Bush boards Air Force One (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

As US President George W Bush boarded Air Force One at 1.25 pm (Washington time), India and the United States began inching towards a closure on the nuclear deal. What Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran called a "short distance" this evening spanned three themes: number of reactors to be put under safeguards, nature of these safeguards and assurances on fuel supply to the reactors. Parallel to this, both sides were also working to close the Container Security Initiative under which select Indian ports will be upgraded to check clandestine traffic of nuclear material. And a reciprocal understanding (called Acquisitions and Cross-Services Agreement) allowing "logistical support" to each other's defence forces. The focus, however, is on the nuclear deal on which efforts picked up pace after a "positive message" from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who spoke to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh within hours of his statement on India's separation plan in Parliament last evening.

Washington Post, 01 March 2006

Growing Threat Seen In Afghan Insurgency-DIA Chief Cites Surging Violence in Homeland (Walter Pincus)

The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told Congress yesterday that the insurgency in Afghanistan is growing and will increase this spring, presenting a greater threat to the central government's expansion of authority "than at any point since late 2001." "Despite significant progress on the political front, the Taliban-dominated insurgency remains a capable and resilient threat," Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples said in a statement presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee at its annual hearing on national security threats. "The Taliban-dominated insurgency remains a capable and resilient threat," Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples told the Senate Armed Services Committee. Appearing with Director of National Intelligence John D. Negroponte, Maples said attacks within Afghanistan were up 20 percent between 2004 and 2005, suicide bombings increased "almost fourfold" and use of makeshift bombs, similar to those used in Iraq, had "more than doubled."

The Hindu, 01 March 2006

Muslims hold anti-Bush rally in Mumbai

Various Muslim organisations staged a protest here on Tuesday against United States President George W. Bush's visit to India. They raised slogans against the U.S. President for attacking Iraq and the Danish cartoonist for blaspheming Prophet Muhammed. Mr. Bush is scheduled to arrive on Wednesday. The rallyists held placards and black flags. There was loud cheering when poems were recited condemning the Danish cartoonist. Speakers said "the superpower cannot continue to bully nations of other religion." There were no women in the rally. Advocate Majeed Memon participated. Mohammed Sood Noori, general secretary, Raza Academy, in a press release, said: "The Academy and several other prominent Muslim organisations call upon the Indian Government to pressure the Government of Denmark to issue an unconditional apology along with stringent action against the culprits..." "On Mr. Bush's visit, he said it was surprising that the Indian Government was playing host to the U.S. President, who attacked Iraq without justification.

The Hindu, 01 March 2006

IAEA says no evidence of Iranian n-weapons plan (Atul Aneja)

As the countdown for a crucial meeting on Iran on March 6 gets under way, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has revealed that it has not found any evidence that Teheran had diverted material towards making atomic weapons. In its report which has been circulated to its 35 board members, the IAEA said that its three years of investigations had not shown "any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices", the Associated Press reported. However, it called upon Iran to substantially increase its cooperation with the IAEA inspectors as the agency has not been able "to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran."

Daily Times, 02 March 2006

Bush will raise militant infiltration issue with Musharraf

US President George W Bush said on Wednesday that he would raise the issue of cross-border infiltration of militants in talks with President Musharraf. Speaking during an unannounced visit to Afghanistan, he said, "These infiltrations are harming our friends and allies, as well as US troops. It will definitely be a topic of conversation." "My message to President Musharraf is that it's important that we bring these people to justice. He understands it and after all they tried to kill him four times," Bush told a news conference in the Afghan capital. He was confident Osama bin Laden "will be brought to justice" despite a so-far futile four-year hunt. Asked about the search for bin Laden, Bush said the search for bin Laden and his associates continues. "It's not a matter of if they're brought to justice, but rather, when they're brought to justice," Bush said at a joint news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul. "We're making progress in dismantling Al Qaeda. Slowly but surely, we're bringing the people to justice and the world is better for it," Bush said.

Daily Times, 02 March 2006

Ideal time to resolve Kashmir: Musharraf

President Musharraf urged President Bush to seize this opportunity to help resolve the Kashmir dispute once and for all. Speaking to BBC ahead of his visit to India and Pakistan which began on Wednesday, he said he was not expecting an imminent breakthrough in a conflict that has poisoned Pakistan's relations with India for nearly six decades. But, he said, he hoped President Bush would lead a renewed push towards a solution. "All that I expect is his weight, his voice pressurising all three groups - me, Indians and Kashmiris - to resolve the dispute now because now is the ideal time, ideal environment to resolve it," he said. Reacting to allegations that Pakistan was a Taliban base, Musharraf said: "If President Karzai thinks everything is happening from Pakistan, I totally disagree. He should put his own house in order. More is happening in Afghanistan itself. Less is happening from Pakistan." Musharraf said the army was taking all possible measures to try to stop militants from crossing Pakistan's border to carry out attacks in Afghanistan. Afghan officials have blamed Pakistani Islamic groups for a recent wave of suicide attacks there, but President Musharraf said the Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, should look closer to home for the main causes of violence. The Pakistani leader also dismissed recent street protests against his military rule as absolute nonsense and said that he did not expect any pressure on this issue from George Bush.

Reuters, 02 March 2006

India welcomes Bush; blasts kill two in Pakistan

U.S. President George W. Bush was given a grand reception in India on Thursday as officials from both countries edged closer to a landmark nuclear deal and communist and Islamist groups vowed more mass protests. As Bush started his formal meetings, police said blasts killed at least two people outside the Marriott Hotel in Karachi in Pakistan, the country that is next on the itinerary of Bush's south Asia tour. A paramilitary brigadier said at least one of the blasts was caused by a car bomb. At least 13 people were wounded, a doctor in the southern port city said. Bush was due to go to Pakistan on Saturday. He arrived in the Indian capital on Wednesday after a surprise visit to Afghanistan, where thousands of U.S. troops are still engaged in hunting down the architects of the September 11 attacks. Pakistan is also a key ally on Bush's war on terrorism. The three-day visit to India was seen as a growing recognition in Washington of the strategic and economic significance of the world's largest democracy after decades of mistrust between the two countries.

New York Times, 02 March 2006

Taliban Rebels Still Menacing Afghan South

When Haji Lalai Mama, the 60-year-old tribal elder in these parts, gamely tried to organize a village defense force against the Taliban recently, he had to do it with a relative handful of men and just three rifles. "We were patrolling and ready," he recalled.

Afghan policemen kept watch for a Taliban attack in Loy Karez a few days after the rebels killed one villager. But they were not ready enough. The Taliban surprised them under cover of darkness by using a side road. One villager was killed, and 10 others were wounded by a grenade. Two Taliban fighters were captured in the clash. The rest disappeared into the night. The men at Loy Karez were exceptional in making a stand at all. Few in southern Afghanistan are ready to stand up to the Taliban, at least not without greater support or benefits from the Afghan government. In fact, four years after the Taliban were ousted from power by the American military, their

presence is bigger and more menacing than ever, say police and government officials, village elders, farmers and aid workers across southern Afghanistan.

Daily Times, 03 March 2006

US president advises India and Pakistan to resolve Kashmir (Iftikhar Gilani)

US President George W Bush advised India and Pakistan on Thursday to work together to resolve all issues, including Kashmir, for lasting peace in the region. Bush also called for India and US to share intelligence on terrorism, but steered clear of suggesting the same between India and Pakistan. "Prime Minister (Manmohan) Singh and President (Pervez) Musharraf have shown themselves to be leaders of courage and vision, and I encourage them to continue making progress on all issues including Kashmir," Bush said at a joint press conference with Singh after a 90-minute meeting at Hyderabad House. "I will bring the same message to Musharraf (information sharing between US and Pakistani intelligence agencies) to fight terrorism." He said that his visit to Pakistan is "very important, as we need to continue working together and combating terrorism".

Daily Times, 03 March 2006

Pakistan not against deal, wants same (Shahzad Raza)

Pakistan said on Thursday it was not against a civilian nuclear deal between the United States and India and demanded the same facility for Pakistan. Information Minister Sheikh Rashid told Daily Times that President Musharraf would discuss the possibility of Pakistan-US cooperation in civilian nuclear technology with US President George Bush. "We hope that we will also get the same kind of cooperation," Foreign Office spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said. Last month Bush urged Pakistan to be patient with US nuclear cooperation with India but did not commit to - or rule out - a similar arrangement with Islamabad in the future. Meanwhile, China said on Thursday that nuclear cooperation between the US and India must conform with the rules of the global non-proliferation regime.

New York Times, 03 March 2006

Dissenting on Atomic Deal With India (Steven R. Weisman)

In concluding its nuclear deal with India, the Bush administration faces significant opposition in Congress and tough questions from its allies on whether the arrangement could set a precedent encouraging the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran and other potential foes of the United States. But Bush administration officials expressed confidence on Thursday that they could overcome the skepticism of the critics, in part because support is nearly universal in the West and among Republicans and Democrats in Washington for building India's strength as a bastion of democracy and a counterweight to China in Asia. The Defense Department issued an unusually explicit statement hailing the deal for opening a path for more American-Indian military cooperation.

Washington Post, 03 March 2006

U.S., India Reach Deal On Nuclear Cooperation

President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced Thursday an unprecedented agreement that would provide U.S. nuclear power assistance to India while allowing the country to substantially step up its nuclear weapons production. The agreement, which marked a significant break from decades of U.S. nuclear policy, highlighted the increasingly close relationship between the world's two largest democracies and enabled both leaders to declare Bush's visit a success. But it also drew protests from some politicians in both countries. In Washington, where the pact is subject to approval by Congress, some lawmakers said the goal of improved bilateral relations must be balanced against the need to curb nuclear proliferation. In India, a number of protests were held to oppose Bush's visit, and socialist groups warned that India should not succumb to U.S. pressure on nuclear issues.

Washington Post, 03 March 2006

Pakistan Blast Kills U.S. Diplomat

An apparent suicide car bomber drove into a vehicle outside the U.S. Consulate here Thursday, detonating a powerful blast that killed a U.S. diplomat and three other people, and wounded at least 50. Officials said the bomb scattered wreckage several hundred feet and shattered windows in the consulate and a nearby luxury hotel. The attack came one day before President Bush was scheduled to travel to Pakistan, following visits to Afghanistan and India. It underscored the fragile security situation in a Muslim country that Washington considers one of its closest and most important allies in the war on terrorism. Bush, at a news conference Thursday in New Delhi, the Indian capital, said the bombing in Karachi would not alter his travel plans, which include spending Friday night in Pakistan.

Daily Times, 04 March 2006

Opp turns down invitation to Bush reception (Shahzad Raza)

The combined opposition on Friday rejected the invitation to attend a presidential reception in honour of US President George Bush. Fazlur Rehman, the Opposition leader in the National Assembly, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, and Raja Zafarul Haq were invited but they turned down the invitations. The PML-N and the MMA rejected the

invitation in protest against President General Pervez Musharraf and President Bush. However, the PPP-P had no objection to President Bush's visit to Pakistan and its regretted staying away from the dinner because of General Musharraf. The main objection of the PML-N and the MMA was that President Bush had supported Musharraf's vision of democracy. "If he supports Musharraf's vision of democracy, then we condemn Bush's own vision of democracy," the PML-N chairman told Daily Times. He said the US president supported a military dictator in Pakistan so that he could serve the US interests in the "so-called war against terrorism". He said the US support to Musharraf has severely damaged the democratic system in Pakistan.

Daily Times, 04 March 2006

US won't mediate on Kashmir, Bush tells Manmohan Singh (Iftikhar Gilani)

US President George W Bush has told Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that he will not mediate on the Kashmir issue. "Kashmir and other issues should be better settled by the Indian and Pakistani governments," Bush said, assuring Singh that the US would not mediate between both countries. Sources quoted him as telling Singh that he praised India's stance against any third-party intervention on the Kashmir issue and hence there was no question of any kind of mediation. He was also quoted as telling Singh that though Pakistan was an important ally in the war on terror, the US would not mediate in the affairs of the two South Asian neighbours. The Indian prime minister had reportedly sought his help in pulling up President Pervez Musharraf for not dismantling alleged terror camps on the borders of Jammu and Kashmir and providing shelter to Indian fugitives wanted for heinous crimes. Bush also told the prime minister that he praised India's positive role in the Afghanistan crisis and was concerned by the rapidly-spreading terror network.

Indian Express, 04 March 2006

With n-deal, Bush gives India more elbow room on Pak (C. Raja Mohan)

The US President, George W. Bush, who arrived in Islamabad tonight might not be able to please his hosts on either nuclear cooperation or Kashmir, but is likely to affirm strong support to the peace process in the Subcontinent and press for a transformation of the triangular relationship between India, Pakistan and the United States. Bush's recognition of India as a "global power," his conscious decision to offer New Delhi a nuclear exception, and his unwillingness to meddle in Kashmir open a rare window of opportunity for India to attempt a genuine political reconciliation with Pakistan. Although Islamabad has gone public with its demand for a nuclear pact similar to the one the US has offered to India, senior officials travelling with Bush during the South Asia trip have repeatedly reaffirmed that the nuclear deal is unique to New Delhi.

Reuters, 04 March 2006

Islamists promise protests as Bush meets Musharraf

Anti-U.S. Islamist parties promised more protests on Saturday, as President George W. Bush prepared to round off a South Asian tour in Pakistan by urging President Pervez Musharraf to do more in the war on terrorism. Bush arrived in Islamabad late on Friday, a day after a suicide car bomber killed an American diplomat and two other people outside the U.S. consulate in the southern city of Karachi. Bush met Musharraf at the president's heavily guarded compound. The U.S. leader walked along a red carpet past a Pakistani honor guard in blue uniforms standing at attention and flanked by guards on horseback. A helicopter circled low over central Islamabad from early in the morning and many police, including riot police, were posted at intersections and on rooftops in the small, leafy capital. There were no immediate reports of protests on Saturday in Islamabad or elsewhere. Islamist Pakistani politicians, some of whom have ties with Pakistani militant groups as well as Taliban insurgents fighting U.S. forces in Afghanistan, succeeded in paralyzing the country on Friday with a widely observed strike call.

Washington Post, 04 March 2006

U.S. Plans to Modernize Nuclear Arsenal (Walter Pincus)

The Bush administration is developing plans to design and deploy refurbished or replacement warheads for the nuclear stockpile, and by 2030 to modernize the production complex so that, if required, it could produce new generations of weapons with different or modified capabilities. Referring to goals established two years ago, Ambassador Linton F. Brooks, administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), told the House Armed Services subcommittee on strategic forces Wednesday that "we will revitalize our weapons design community to meet the challenge of being able to adapt an existing weapon within 18 months, and design, develop and begin production of a new design within three to four years of a decision to enter engineering development." Brooks's description of the U.S. plan for nuclear weapons production came one day before President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced their agreement for sharing nuclear technology, while permitting India to continue production of weapons-grade materials at one-third of their reactors. It also came one day after testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee by Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, described how India and other nations are moving forward with their own nuclear programs. "We believe that India and Pakistan . . . continue expanding and modernizing their nuclear weapon stockpiles," Maples said, adding, "Pakistan has also developed the capability to produce plutonium for potential weapons use." He also reported that North Korea is continuing to produce plutonium for its nuclear program, and that China "is likely" to increase the number of its nuclear-armed theater and strategic

weapons and "has sufficient fissile material to support this growth."

Daily Times, 06 March 2006

Pakistan, US pledge to keep fighting terror (Rana Qaisar)

Pakistan and the United States on Saturday reaffirmed their commitment to a lasting strategic partnership with close cooperation in the war on terror. "Part of my mission today was to determine whether or not the president is as committed as he has been in the past to bringing the terrorists to justice, and he is," US President George W Bush said in response to a question at a joint press conference with President General Pervez Musharraf. "He understands the stakes; he understands the responsibility; and he understands the need to make sure our strategy is able to defeat the enemy." The presidents held one-on-one talks that lasted an hour. "We have laid the foundation of a very strong, sustainable, broad-based and long-term relationship by commencing strategic dialogue in an institutional manner," President Musharraf said. Civil nuclear cooperation: The US president made no commitment when asked about the possibility of granting Pakistan the same kind of nuclear agreement reached between Washington and New Delhi. "I explained (to the president) that Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories. So, as we proceed forward, our strategy will take in effect those well-known differences."

Reuters, 06 March 2006

Iran said to step up plans for Shahab missiles (Louis Charbonneau)

As Iran pursues a nuclear program the West fears is aimed at producing bombs, Tehran also appears to be stepping up development of missiles capable of carrying atomic warheads, diplomats citing intelligence say. According to an intelligence report given to Reuters by a non-U.S. diplomat, a covert Iranian program run by people closely linked to Iran's military includes plans to arm its Shahab-3 missiles, which experts believe have a maximum range of around 2,000 km (1,240 miles), with nuclear warheads. The report, which could not be independently confirmed, surfaced as the United States and its allies seek to highlight the potential security dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran. The report said it was code-named Project 111 and that the "aim is arming Shahab-3 missiles with nuclear warheads". An Iranian official, who asked not to be named, denied the charge. The assessment that Iran has nuclear ambitions for the Shahab-3 is shared by the European Union, Washington and Israel, said an EU diplomat who asked not to be named.

Reuters, 06 March 2006

Pakistan choppers attack militants on Afghan border (Zeeshan Haider)

Pakistani security forces battled Islamist rebels holding out in a town near the Afghan border on Monday, killing 19 of them as the toll from three days of clashes rose to more than 120, the military said. The pro-Taliban rebels launched attacks on government positions in Miranshah town on Saturday as U.S. President George W. Bush was meeting Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in the capital and the fighting has raged since then. "Helicopter gunships have been pounding militant positions around Miranshah," a resident of the main town in the North Waziristan tribal region said on Monday. "The situation is very tense." The semi-autonomous ethnic Pashtun lands along the Afghan border are Pakistan's front line in the war on terrorism. Many al Qaeda militants fled to the area awash with weapons after U.S. and Afghan opposition forces ousted the Taliban in late 2001, and were given refuge by Taliban supporters among the Pashtun clans. Pakistani forces have been trying to clear foreign militants from the border and subdue their Pakistani allies since late 2004 and hundreds of people have been killed.

The Hindu, 06 March 2006

Manmohan's "bad bargain" irks Left

The Left parties on Sunday said the "bad bargain" by India with the U.S. in economic, defence, agriculture and other crucial fields dealt during President George W. Bush's visit was detrimental to the country's commercial and strategic interests. The four Left parties supporting the UPA government - CPI(M), CPI, Forward Bloc and RSP - will analyse and review Bush's visit in a day or two. Left leaders also took a serious view of the U.S. President "advising" India to open up FDI in all sectors, including agriculture and services, and join the fight with the U.S. for "freedom and democracy," especially in Iran, Cuba, North Korea and Zimbabwe. Communist Party of India general secretary A. B. Bardhan said: "We believe that Mr. Bush has struck a deal with the Manmohan Singh government which will benefit the American corporates and boost the U.S. arms industry." The CPI veteran said the agreement on agricultural research was equally worrying, as it would open up the sector to "predatory" MNCs like Monsanto and Walmart. CPI(M) Parliamentary group leader in the Lok Sabha, Basudeb Acharya, demanded that the Prime Minister make a detailed statement on all aspects of the agreements.

Indian Express, 06 March 2006

Bush is blunt to Gen: No N-deal...Pak, India have different needs, different histories

US President George W Bush made clear today that Pakistan should not expect anytime soon a civilian nuclear agreement like the one the United States reached days ago with India, and he bluntly said that the two archrivals of the subcontinent cannot be compared to each other. Bush said that he and Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf had discussed a civilian nuclear program for Pakistan during talks this morning. "I explained that

Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories," Bush said at a joint news conference with Musharraf on the grounds of the presidential palace, Aiwan-e-Sadr. "So as we proceed forward, our strategy will take in effect those well-known differences." Bush had never been expected to endorse a nuclear agreement with Pakistan, the country of A Q Khan, the founder of Pakistan's nuclear program who has confessed to running the largest illegal nuclear proliferation network in history. But it was striking that the President spoke so directly as his host, Musharraf, stood at his side.

Daily Times, 07 March 2006

Bush optimistic about solutions to Kashmir and Palestine: Fighting terrorism in Pakistan's national interest: Musharraf

President General Pervez Musharraf said on Monday that it was in Pakistan's national interest to fight terrorism and extremism and that by doing so his government wasn't doing the US or the international community any favour for which it should be rewarded. He also shrugged off allegations of "collateral damage" in the war against terror, arguing that it was minimal given the nature of the conflict in Waziristan. He was rebutting a suggestion made by one editor at a meeting with editors in Islamabad at the Army House yesterday afternoon that the focus on the war against terror by the Musharraf regime was misplaced. "How can we not focus on terrorism or not talk about it when the ground reality is that there are terrorists in Pakistan who are giving the country a bad name", he asked, clearly suggesting that the terrorists were hurting Pakistan rather than the war against terrorism. In a wide ranging discussion, a relaxed General Musharraf dilated upon the utility of the Bush visit, why he told CNN that the charges made by the Kabul government against Islamabad were nonsensical, and why Pakistanis shouldn't view developments from an "India-centric" mode of analysis in every situation. He also laid to rest fears that he would cave in under pressure from the US or the international community to hand over Dr A Q Khan or anyone else from the nuclear establishment to the US. "One scientist (Dr Faruli) and one businessman (Mr Jafri) are also under investigation but they too won't be handed over to any foreign power", he revealed.

Reuters, 07 March 2006

US still opposes Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline

The White House said on Tuesday it still opposes a proposed natural gas pipeline linking energy-rich Iran with India, clarifying remarks by President George W. Bush that seemed to soften U.S. opposition to the project. Bush had seemed to suggest a shift in policy when he said during a visit to Pakistan on Friday that "our beef with Iran is not the pipeline, our beef with Iran is the fact that they want to develop a nuclear weapon." India and Iran have been discussing a \$7 billion natural gas pipeline that would run through Pakistan. Iran has the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world behind Russia -- about 940 trillion cubic feet. Growing Asian economies, including India and Pakistan, are scrambling to find energy sources to feed industrial expansion. "As we stated before, the U.S. government does not support the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline," said White House National Security Council spokesman Frederick Jones. Jones said while the United States recognized the growing energy needs of India and Pakistan, "we have repeatedly expressed concerns about international participation in energy projects with Iran." This concern is over "Iran's nuclear activities, support for terrorists, and (its) atrocious human rights record," Jones said. India has to tread a tightrope in pipeline talks, trying to satisfy its appetite for hydrocarbons while not upsetting Washington. It faces a natural gas deficit of 200 million cubic meters a day in 20 years.

Reuters, 07 March 2006

India says to complete nuclear separation by 2014 (Y.P. Rajesh)

India will open 14 of its 22 nuclear plants for international inspections by 2014 as part of a landmark civilian nuclear cooperation deal with the United States, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Tuesday. Under the deal, India, which first tested nuclear weapons in 1974, has agreed to separate its civilian and military nuclear programs, allowing international scrutiny for the bulk of its power stations to ensure non-proliferation. However, the pact has to be approved by the U.S. Congress and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), an informal club of nations that controls global atomic trade, before New Delhi can access foreign nuclear reactors and fuel. "We are preparing a list of 14 reactors that would be offered for (international) safeguards between 2006-14," Singh told parliament. "The choice of specific nuclear reactors ... is an Indian decision," he said. Singh's statement to parliament came less than a week after he and visiting U.S. President George W. Bush sealed the controversial agreement which aims to help India boost its nuclear power capacity to meet its soaring energy needs. Singh said New Delhi had also agreed to international inspections for all its future civilian atomic plants. But he stressed that the agreement did not cover the experimental fast breeder reactor program nor would it cap the nuclear weapons program.

Washington Post, 07 March 2006

Pro-Taliban Rebel Holdouts Give Pakistanis a Fierce Fight (Inam Khan)

Pakistani security forces battled pro-Taliban rebels holding out in a town near the Afghan border on Monday, killing 19 of them as the toll from three days of clashes rose to more than 120, the military said. The rebels launched attacks on government positions in Miran Shah on Saturday as President Bush met Pakistan's

president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, in the capital. The fighting has raged since. People flee fighting between security forces and pro-Taliban rebels in Miran Shah, Pakistan, an ethnic Pashtun tribal area near the Afghan border. "Helicopter gunships have been pounding militant positions around Miran Shah," said a resident of the town that serves as the administrative capital of North Waziristan, a tribal region. "The situation is very tense." The semiautonomous ethnic Pashtun lands along the Afghan border are Pakistan's front line in the war on terrorism. After U.S. and Afghan opposition forces ousted the Taliban in late 2001, many al-Qaeda militants fled to the area, which was awash in weapons. Taliban supporters among the Pashtun clans offered al-Qaeda a refuge. Hundreds of people have been killed since late 2004 as Pakistani forces have been trying to clear foreign militants from the border area and subdue their Pakistani allies. Government forces faced stiff resistance as they tried to remove the last of the rebels from Miran Shah on Monday, said a military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan. Militants launched attacks and seized government buildings Saturday in Miran Shah in revenge for a government attack Wednesday that killed 45 fighters. The toll from the first day of fighting rose from 46 to more than 100 militants as more detailed reports arrived, Sultan said. Two militants were killed Sunday.

Washington Post, 07 March 2006

Afghan Threat Played Down-NATO Chief Says Revived Insurgency Isn't Likely (Ann Scott Tyson)

The commander of NATO forces said yesterday that rising attacks in Afghanistan will test NATO troops as the alliance expands into volatile southern regions of the country this summer, but he stressed that al-Qaeda and Taliban rebels lack the ability to reignite a major insurgency. Marine Gen. James L. Jones, NATO's supreme allied commander, played down an increase in violence more than four years after the U.S.-led military campaign ousted the Taliban from power in 2001. He said remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in pockets of the country cannot "restart an insurgency of any size and major scope." Instead, Jones cited the growing cultivation and trade of opium poppies as the "most serious problem" facing the central Asian nation today. A field survey released yesterday by the Afghan government and the United Nations predicted an increase in poppy cultivation in 2006 in 13 provinces and a decrease in three, with 16 others remaining unchanged. "Afghanistan is on the way to recovery but is also fighting some internal demons. And one is certainly the narcotics culture and the dependence of the economy on narcotics," Jones said at a Pentagon news briefing. He said the military will play a supporting role in counternarcotics efforts, supplying intelligence and security while the Afghan government takes the lead in destroying crops.

Daily Times, 08 March 2006

India to open 14 nuclear plants to inspection by 2014 (Iftikhar Gilani)

India will open 14 of its 22 nuclear plants for international inspections by 2014 as part of a civilian nuclear cooperation deal with the United States, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Tuesday. "We are preparing a list of 14 reactors that would be offered for (international) safeguards between 2006-14," Singh told parliament. "The choice of specific nuclear reactors... is an Indian decision," he said. Singh said New Delhi had also agreed to international inspections for all its future civilian atomic plants. But "the government of India retains the sole right to determine such reactors as civilian," he said. He stressed that the agreement did not cover the experimental fast breeder reactor programme nor would it cap the nuclear weapons programme. "The ability to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent is intact," Singh told parliament, adding, "there will be no capping of our strategic (read military) programme." "This means India will not be constrained in any way in building future nuclear facilities, whether civilian or military, as per our national requirements," said Singh. "The integrity of our nuclear doctrine and our ability to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent is adequately protected."

Reuters, 08 March 2006

US still opposed to IPI pipeline

The White House said on Tuesday it still opposes a proposed natural gas pipeline linking Iran with India, clarifying remarks by President George W. Bush that seemed to soften US opposition to the project. Bush had seemed to suggest a shift in policy when he said during a visit to Pakistan on Friday that "our beef with Iran is not the pipeline, our beef with Iran is the fact that they want to develop a nuclear weapon." India and Iran have been discussing a \$7 billion natural gas pipeline that would run through Pakistan. Iran has the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world behind Russia - about 940 trillion cubic feet.

Washington Post, 08 March 2006

U.S., Russia Cooperate on Iran Amid Rifts (Glenn Kessler)

The United States and Russia publicly closed ranks yesterday over the need for Iran to ease international concerns over its nuclear program, but growing fissures in the U.S.-Russian relationship were apparent when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with reporters yesterday after two days of meetings. Though Lavrov said it was too early to discuss U.N. sanctions against Iran, Vice President Cheney had already issued a blunt threat that Iran will face "meaningful consequences" if it fails to cooperate with international efforts to curb its nuclear program. Cheney told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee yesterday that the United States "is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the regime" and is sending "a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

Washington Post, 08 March 2006

House Agrees To Vote On Ports (Jonathan Weisman)

Efforts by the White House to hold off legislation challenging a Dubai-owned company's acquisition of operations at six major U.S. ports collapsed yesterday when House Republican leaders agreed to allow a vote next week that could kill the deal. Appropriations Committee Chairman Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) will attach legislation to block the deal today to a must-pass emergency spending bill funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A House vote on the measure next week will set up a direct confrontation with President Bush, who sternly vowed to veto any bill delaying or stopping Dubai Ports World's purchase of London-based Peninsular & Oriental Steamship Co. House Republican leaders are trying to block the takeover of operations at six U.S. ports. "Listen, this is a very big political problem," said House Majority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio), explaining that he had to give his rank-and-file members a chance to vote. "There are two things that go on in this town. We do public policy, and we do politics. And you know, most bills at the end of the day, the politics and the policy kind of come together, but not always. And we are into one of these situations where this has become a very hot political potato."

Washington Post, 08 March 2006

China Warns U.S. On Issue of Taiwan (Edward Cody)

March 7 -- China warned the United States on Tuesday against sending "false signals" to Taiwan by playing down a recent decision by the island to do away with the National Unification Council. Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said Taiwan's decision constituted an "open provocation" that required a tough response not only from China but also from other governments. In its announcement Feb. 27, Taiwan said that the council had "ceased to function" and that its set of guidelines for the eventual unification of Taiwan and China had "ceased to apply." "This is a dangerous step toward independence," Li said at a news conference held as part of the annual meeting of the Chinese legislature, the National People's Congress. He expressed hope that the United States would have a "correct understanding" of the gravity of Taiwan's move. Li's comments suggested China had been disappointed by the Bush administration's reaction to Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian's decision to do away with the council. In the increasingly close cooperation between Washington and Beijing, China has come to rely on the United States to rein in Chen's pro-independence ardor, lest it lead to a military crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

Daily Times, 08 March 2006

India to open 14 nuclear plants to inspection by 2014 (Iftikhar Gilani)

India will open 14 of its 22 nuclear plants for international inspections by 2014 as part of a civilian nuclear cooperation deal with the United States, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Tuesday. "We are preparing a list of 14 reactors that would be offered for (international) safeguards between 2006-14," Singh told parliament. "The choice of specific nuclear reactors... is an Indian decision," he said. Singh said New Delhi had also agreed to international inspections for all its future civilian atomic plants. But "the government of India retains the sole right to determine such reactors as civilian," he said. He stressed that the agreement did not cover the experimental fast breeder reactor programme nor would it cap the nuclear weapons programme. "The ability to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent is intact," Singh told parliament, adding, "there will be no capping of our strategic (read military) programme." "This means India will not be constrained in any way in building future nuclear facilities, whether civilian or military, as per our national requirements," said Singh. "The integrity of our nuclear doctrine and our ability to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent is adequately protected."

Reuters, 08 March 2006

US still opposed to IPI pipeline

The White House said on Tuesday it still opposes a proposed natural gas pipeline linking Iran with India, clarifying remarks by President George W Bush that seemed to soften US opposition to the project. Bush had seemed to suggest a shift in policy when he said during a visit to Pakistan on Friday that "our beef with Iran is not the pipeline, our beef with Iran is the fact that they want to develop a nuclear weapon." India and Iran have been discussing a \$7 billion natural gas pipeline that would run through Pakistan. Iran has the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world behind Russia - about 940 trillion cubic feet.

Washington Post, 08 March 2006

U.S., Russia Cooperate on Iran Amid Rifts (Glenn Kessler)

The United States and Russia publicly closed ranks yesterday over the need for Iran to ease international concerns over its nuclear program, but growing fissures in the U.S.-Russian relationship were apparent when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with reporters yesterday after two days of meetings. Though Lavrov said it was too early to discuss U.N. sanctions against Iran, Vice President Cheney had already issued a blunt threat that Iran will face "meaningful consequences" if it fails to cooperate with international efforts to curb its nuclear program. Cheney told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee yesterday that the United States "is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the regime" and is sending "a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

Washington Post, 08 March 2006

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Daily Times, 09 March 2006

IAEA clears way for UN action on Iran

The UN nuclear watchdog on Wednesday opened the way for Security Council action against Iran over its nuclear programme, sparking an angry reaction from Tehran which threatened Washington with "harm and pain" for leading the charge. A report on Iran's programme, which the West fears is hiding a covert drive for the atom bomb, will now be sent to the UN body in New York, US ambassador Gregory Schulte told reporters here. A top US official in Washington said the dossier would be brought up next week at the Security Council. "If Iran doesn't respond to words, we believe the world community should entertain the possibility of sanctions," Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns told a House of Representatives committee. "But it's going to be incumbent upon our allies around the world to show that they are willing to act," he added.

Reuters, 09 March 2006

China, hitting back, slams US rights abuses

China hit back at U.S. criticism of its human rights record on Thursday, unveiling its own report detailing U.S. rights abuses, while Chinese activists issued a critical look at their own country's restricted freedoms. The Chinese report, issued by the State Council, or Cabinet, takes aim at U.S. democracy -- calling it "a game for the rich" -- the high murder rate, domestic wire tapping and detention of Iraqi reporters by U.S. forces in Iraq. "We urge the United States government to face squarely their own human rights problems, reflect on their own actions, take practical measures and improve their human rights situation," the report, carried by the official Xinhua news agency, said. Other abuses involved "secret snooping, police abuse, wrong convictions and the highest ratio of people behind bars", it said. But a group of Chinese lawyers and rights activists said in their own report there were modest expansions of some freedoms in 2005, though many citizens' rights remained narrow, fragile or non-existent. "Relative to economic development and social progress, the government has not done enough to actively protect and expand civic rights," said the report issued by the Open Constitution Initiative, an independent organization that investigates claims of rights violation and pushes policy change.

Washington Post, 09 March 2006

Iran Threatens U.S. With 'Harm and Pain'

Iran on Wednesday threatened the United States with "harm and pain" if the U.N. Security Council imposes sanctions on the Islamic republic over its nuclear program. Its statement came just before ambassadors to the council began discussing possible action concerning Iran. "The United States may have the power to cause harm and pain, but it is also susceptible to harm and pain," Javad Vaeidi, head of the Iranian delegation to the International Atomic Energy Agency, told the agency's board during an all-day, closed-door meeting here. "So if the United States wishes to choose that path, let the ball roll." Vaeidi did not elaborate on steps Iran might take against the United States. Iran's oil minister, Kazem Vaziri Hamaneh, said Wednesday that Iran would not curtail oil exports as a response to developments in the Security Council, but some analysts consider that to be a

possibility. Responding to Vaedi's remarks, White House press secretary Scott McClellan told reporters in New Orleans that "provocative statements and actions only further isolate Iran from the rest of the world." Vice President Cheney said on Tuesday that Iran would face "meaningful consequences" if it did not back down.

Hindustan Times, 09 March 2006

Indo-US pact won't affect dealings with Iran: Burns (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

US has rejected the notion that proceeding with the civilian nuclear energy agreement with India undercuts America's dealing with Iran on the issue. Testifying before the Full International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives on Wednesday, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns stressed that the US looked at both the cases differently. Burns also said that unlike "autocratic" Iran, India was not rejecting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "Iran is autocratic and adversarial and one of the greatest threats to the world today. India, ... Is ready to bring the IAEA in for the first time to place safeguards on a great majority of Indian facilities. The Iranians are trying to kick the IAEA out," Burns said in response to a question. "So these two countries are going in opposite directions, both in our relationship and with that of the IAEA," the senior administration official remarked.

Hindustan Times, 09 March 2006

Bush sells N-deal to lawmakers (S Rajagopalan)

In the first push for congressional nod for the Indo-US nuke deal, President George W Bush held discussions with a group of leading lawmakers on Tuesday and sought their support for the measure. The White House meeting, lasting an hour, was attended by over a dozen lawmakers from both chambers. The group included Richard Lugar, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators Hillary Clinton and John Cornyn, Representatives Tom Lantos, Duncan Hunter, Gary Ackerman and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Bush, giving a broad overview of the nuke deal, sought their help in seeing the measure through in what many observers believe would be a tough act. Aware of the complexities, Bush himself wanted to know from the lawmakers the concerns on Capitol Hill on the issue. Some members reportedly pointed to prevailing concerns over undermining the non-proliferation regime, while one or two voiced fears that the deal could embolden China to come up with something similar for Pakistan.

Hindustan Times, 09 March 2006

US condemns Varanasi blasts as acts of terrorism

The United States has condemned the blasts in Varanasi that killed at least 28 persons and injured scores, calling them "acts of terrorism". "... If you take a look at it, it is quite clear that these are acts of terrorism, although at this point I can't tell you who's responsible for these bombings. So we would ... Certainly condemn these acts", State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said on Tuesday. He also offered condolences and wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. "And clearly our hearts go out to those who've lost loved ones and we wish a speedy recovery to those who were injured in these bomb blasts," the Spokesman said. He added that he did not have any information at this time as to who was behind the attacks and whether any American citizens were affected by them. "At this point I don't have any information that any American citizens were affected by this, but again, we're still in the early moments of the aftermath of these bombings," McCormack said.

The Hindu, 10 March 2006

Nuclear deal sent to U.S. Congress

The Bush administration submitted to Congress its proposal to change the U.S. law to allow sale of nuclear technology to India, Congressional sources said. The sources told Reuters on Thursday that the administration wanted the first of two legislative steps taken by May, but said this would be difficult because the Bill raised questions about an already complicated and controversial nuclear deal. Approved in principle last July and confirmed in more detail last week by the U.S. President and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the agreement will end a three-decades ban on the sale of U.S. civilian nuclear technology. But it must first be approved by Congress. Although Mr. Bush and Dr. Singh announced that India would place 14 of 22 civilian nuclear power reactors under international inspections to guard against weapons diversion, a Congressional source said the data sent to Congress on this point was incomplete. Daryl Kimball of the Washington-based Arms Control Association called the presidential determinations "minimal" and said they gave the U.S. "virtually no leverage to ensure that India kept its side of the bargain." In addition to obtaining the Atomic Energy Act exemption, the administration must negotiate a nuclear cooperation agreement with India that, the sources said, could take a year. That too must be approved by Congress.

Reuters, 10 March 2006

Bush says diplomacy way to tackle Iran (Caren Bohan)

U.S. President George W. Bush on Friday called Iran a "grave national security concern," but said he sought a diplomatic way to cap its nuclear goals. A hard-line Iranian cleric told a Friday prayers congregation in Tehran earlier that Bush was using the nuclear issue to further his goal of overthrowing the Islamic Republic. The United

Nations Security Council, which has the power to impose sanctions on Iran but is unlikely to do so soon, has begun to tackle Iran's case after the U.N. nuclear watchdog sent the 15 members a report on Wednesday saying it could not verify that Iran's atomic activities were peaceful. The five council powers with veto rights were working on a statement they hope the full council can consider next week. The statement is expected to call on Iran to suspend all uranium-enrichment activities. Bush said U.S. concerns were the result of Iran's stated desire to destroy Israel and Washington's belief that Tehran wants to build nuclear bombs -- something the Iranians deny. "You begin to see an issue of grave national security concern," Bush told a newspaper group. "Therefore it's very important for the United States to continue to work with others to solve these issues diplomatically, deal with these threats today," he said.

Washington Post, 10 March 2006

U.S. Presses China and Russia for U.N. Council Action on Iran (Colum Lynch)

The United States, France and Britain remained at odds with Russia and China on Friday over what role the Security Council should play in pressing Iran to abide by the United Nations' demand to cease the enrichment of uranium that could potentially be diverted to a nuclear weapons program. The Bush administration, backed by France and Britain, pressed Moscow and Beijing at a meeting of the council's five veto-wielding members to support the swift adoption of a Security Council statement urging Iran to seek a negotiated settlement to an escalating nuclear crisis or face the possible threat of sanctions. Iran threatened the United States with "harm and pain" Wednesday if the U.S. tries to use the U.N. Security Council which has the power to impose sanctions as a lever to punish Tehran for its suspect nuclear program.

Reuters, 10 March 2006

Report faults India's nonproliferation record (Carol Giacomo)

India circumvents other countries' export controls and leaks sensitive technology in procuring materials for its nuclear programs, according to a report by former U.N. weapons inspector David Albright. The Indian Embassy dismissed the report as "baseless." The report, released on Friday, challenges a central U.S. argument in favor of a landmark U.S.-India nuclear deal: that India has such an impeccable record of protecting technology it can be trusted with U.S. and other foreign nuclear material. Albright, a physicist who heads the Institute for Science and International Security, said he had "uncovered a well-developed and secret Indian program to outfit its uranium enrichment program and circumvent other countries' export control efforts." The report, co-authored by researcher Susan Basu, said when India seeks bids for nuclear-related equipment, it allows prospective suppliers to buy blueprints and manufacturing instructions for a particular item. Company officials could then sell the item or related technology to other customers. "That's what we think is new, that you could go buy some centrifuge design information through the Indian procurement system," Albright told Reuters in an interview. "This is not a normal way of doing business. It's a very irresponsible way to handle sensitive information," he added. Indian Embassy spokesman Venu Rajamony told Reuters, "This so-called report is ridiculous and filled with all kinds of baseless charges."

Daily Times, 10 March 2006

White House defends India N-pact

The White House struck back on Wednesday at critics of a US-India nuclear deal, denying that the agreement will fuel a South Asia arms race or set a bad example for Israel, Iran, or North Korea. US President Bush made the new accord the centerpiece of his recently concluded trip to India and Pakistan but faces an uphill battle to get it through the US Congress, where critics have vowed to defeat it. In the agreement reached last week, Bush reversed longstanding US policy by agreeing to sell sensitive nuclear technology to India even though New Delhi is not a party to the NPT. In a sign that the domestic political fight over the agreement has started in earnest, the White House released a statement aimed at quieting some of the more serious criticisms. It denied that the deal would accelerate the nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan, saying Washington "has no intention of aiding" New Delhi's atomic weapons program or of reaching a similar cooperation deal with Islamabad. "We do not intend to pursue a similar civil nuclear cooperation initiative with Pakistan," said the White House. It also dismissed any notion of a double standard that might embolden nuclear ambitions in Tehran or Pyongyang. "It is not credible to compare the rogue regimes of North Korea and Iran to India. Unlike Iran or North Korea, India has been a peaceful and vibrant democracy with a strong nuclear non-proliferation record," the White House said. Iran and North Korea signed and ratified the NPT, but both "broke the very non-proliferation commitments they claimed to follow" and both are "state sponsors of terrorism," it said.

The Hindu, 11 March 2006

Deal will end nuclear apartheid, hopes CWC

Approving the Indo-U.S. nuclear energy deal, the Congress Working Committee on Saturday expressed the hope the agreement would effectively end the nuclear apartheid regime New Delhi has been subjected to. The CWC appreciated the manner in which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his colleagues concluded the agreement, and also the "close and meaningful consultations he has had with the Congress president and the party to ensure that national sovereignty is not only protected but also enhanced." In a statement, the CWC said it was made sure

that the national strategic interest did not suffer in anyway and that the agreement met with the approval of scientists. During the meeting here, some members said the party should propagate the agreement before the people. That exercise would help to counter the questions being raised against it, said sources privy to the discussion. Some members said the fact that some supporting parties and the Opposition were on the same side on this issue did not send out the right signal.

Reuters, 11 March 2006

US probably can stop Iran without force: senators (John Poirier)

The United States probably can stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons without military action, but use of force, subject to congressional approval, is still an option, U.S. lawmakers said. "I think we can stop them from having a nuclear weapon short of war," Sen. Joseph Biden, a Delaware Democrat, said on NBC's "Meet The Press" television program. Republican Sen. George Allen of Virginia said on the same show: "Ultimately, you never want to take military action off the table. But you never want it to get that far. But if necessary, it is an option. But it is not one that is desirable." Biden and Allen, both potential U.S. presidential candidates in 2008, agreed that Washington must work with other countries to deal with Iran, and that Bush would need congressional approval before the United States participates in military action to curb Iran's nuclear weapons program. "He has to do that," Biden said. "I believe he should, and I believe he would if necessary," said Allen.

The Hindu, 11 March 2006

Iran gives contradictory signals (Atul Aneja)

Iran has given contradictory signals about its intentions, with its Foreign Ministry retracting its position that it was no longer considering the Russian proposal on nuclear enrichment to defuse tensions with the West. "The Russian proposal is not on our agenda any more," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said on Sunday on the sidelines of an international energy conference in Teheran. But later the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted him as saying that, "Iran is well-prepared to extend a moratorium on uranium enrichment if an agreement was reached with respective states to that effect through negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)." He said the Russian proposal was still negotiable if it took Iran's right to enrich uranium on a research scale at home. On March 7, Russia and the United States rejected the Iranian proposal to limit itself to small-scale enrichment of uranium under international supervision for research purposes alone. Russia has offered to carry out uranium enrichment on its soil and both sides have been holding talks on this. The move is meant to allay fears in the West, especially the U.S., that Iran could divert enriched uranium for making atomic weapons by processing the material on its own territory.

Daily Times, 11 March 2006

Islamophobia worse in US now than after 9/11

Negative feelings towards Islam have grown more popular since immediately after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Writing in The Guardian on Friday, Suzanne Goldenberg reported that a majority of Americans today believe that Islam has more violent followers than any other religion, and that the religion encourages violence against non-Muslims. Goldenberg quoted a Washington Post-ABC News poll as indicating that negative images of Islam are much more prominent than immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Centre. "A majority, 58 percent, of those interviewed now believe that Islam has more violent followers than any other religion. The poll of 1,000 was conducted by phone last week and has a three-point error margin. Since January 2002, the proportion of those who believe that mainstream Islam promotes violence against non-believers has risen from 14 to 32 percent," Goldenberg wrote in The Guardian. Analysts have attributed the increased negativity towards Islam to a number of factors; namely the aborted takeover of US ports operations by a Dubai-based firm, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the victory of militant group Hamas in the Palestinian elections, and the violent protests in the Muslim world over the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Washington Post, 11 March 2006

Port Deal's Political Fallout Not Over (Jonathan Weisman)

House Republican leaders will unveil legislation as soon as next week demanding a congressional role in reviewing the acquisition of U.S. businesses by foreign buyers, suggesting that the controversy over a now-abandoned Dubai port deal will continue to roil congressional relations with the Bush administration. House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) is drafting a bill to require congressional oversight as the administration reviews such foreign acquisitions, a role Congress has not played since the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States (CFIUS) was created three decades ago. Cargo containers are unloaded in Baltimore, one of six U.S. seaports with terminal operations that were acquired by Dubai Ports World. After an uproar, the firm said that it will transfer those operations to a U.S. entity.

Hindustan Times, 13 March 2006

US ties with India, Pakistan on divergent paths

President George W Bush's visit to India and Pakistan this month underscored dramatically the increasingly divergent US approaches to the South Asian nuclear rivals. India is the celebrated rising democratic power for whom Washington is willing to jettison 30 years of non-proliferation policy so New Delhi can buy US nuclear energy technology. Pakistan, its future stability in question, gets nudged by Washington to do more to fight terrorism and to expand democratic freedoms. "If Pakistan is going to judge its relationship with the United States by how close the United States is to India, it's bound to be disappointed because the US-India relationship is at a historic high-water point," said Teresita Schaffer of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. India, whose relations with the United States were long mired in Cold War politics, is now basking in the glow of the landmark nuclear energy deal and of being anointed by Bush as a global power central to US geopolitical strategy. In Pakistan, by contrast, commentators expressed concern that President Pervez Musharraf had little to show for an alliance with Washington that has pitted its army against its own people in the post-September 11 hunt for Al-Qaeda militants on the Afghan border.

Hindustan Times, 13 March 2006

India tightens rules for nuclear export

India has tightened the screw on export of nuclear equipment and technology in a move that seems to be a fallout of its recent deal with the United States. Under the new guidelines, their export can be authorised only when "the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguard-arrangements are made or assured by the recipient country." Furthermore, "the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) should be satisfied that the transfers would not contribute to the development of nuclear weapons or be diverted to acts of nuclear terrorism." Each and every application for export shall be scrutinised on case-by-case basis by the licensing authority (DAE). Licenses are subject to recipient states having relevant IAEA safeguards agreement in force and agreeing to on-site verifications. India also reserves the right to apply additional conditions of supply as a matter of national policy. In addition, the consent of the Government of India should be required for any re-transfer of exported items or related technology. The guidelines prohibit export of certain "prescribed" substances or technologies "when there is an unacceptable risk of their diversion to the development of a nuclear device." Otherwise, virtually the entire range of nuclear technologies developed by DAE in the last 40 years, including enrichment technology, can be exported if IAEA safeguards are applied to them by recipient nations.

Reuters, 13 March 2006

Anti-terror ties focus of Rice's Indonesia visit (Achmad Sukarsono)

Cooperation in the war against terrorism will be the focus of Condoleezza Rice's first visit to Indonesia as U.S. secretary of state this week, but the two sides will also be looking to strengthen business and political ties. Despite differences over Middle East policy and sporadic, but large, anti-American demonstrations in Indonesia, Jakarta and Washington have generally good relations, and the southeast Asian nation is considered a close ally in U.S. anti-terrorism efforts. One sticking point is Jakarta's repeated requests to at least get direct access to Indonesian militant Hambali, in American hands since 2003, and ideally have him sent back to Indonesia. "In the talks, Indonesia should argue that, without our help, the spectre of terror is difficult to beat and more cooperation is needed," said Hariyadi Wirawan, head of the international relations department at the University of Indonesia. "There is lip service and there is reality. The fact is the teamwork is not balanced. The U.S. prefers taking control of key operations (rather) than letting us handle the matter."

Reuters, 13 March 2006

Bomb kills 4 US soldiers in Afghanistan

Four U.S. soldiers were killed on Sunday after a blast ripped through their armoured vehicle in Afghanistan, the U.S. military said. The soldiers were killed during a patrol in the eastern province of Kunar, which lies close to the border with Pakistan, in an attack claimed by Taliban insurgents. "The extremists that initiated this senseless attack create a significant danger and threat to the Afghan people," said Major General Benjamin C. Freakley for the U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. The attack marked the U.S. military's single biggest loss in a day in the country for several months and brought to 10 the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan this year. A Taliban commander, Mullah Abdul Manan, said the attack was carried out through a remote controlled device by Taliban guerrillas who are mostly active in southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan close to the border with Pakistan. The attack comes amid rising violence by ousted Islamic Taliban militants who have recently stepped up their attacks against foreign forces based in Afghanistan and President Hamid Karzai's government. U.S.-led forces overthrew the Taliban government in late 2001 after its leaders refused to hand over al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, the architect of the September 11 attacks on the United States. More than 70 foreign troops, most of them Americans, have been killed in Taliban-linked violence in Afghanistan in the past year, the bloodiest period since the fall of the Taliban.

The Hindu, 13 March 2006

Left, BJP slam nuclear pact

The India-U.S. nuclear deal came in for sharp criticism in Parliament on Saturday with the Left parties accusing the Government of bartering the country's independent foreign policy for an unequal treaty, while the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) said India had emerged a junior partner of the U.S. Both the parties pressed for evolving a political consensus on the nuclear and other agreements reached with the U.S.. They wanted the Agriculture Knowledge Initiative and the CEO's Agreements to be tabled. In Rajya Sabha, CPI-Marxist member Nilotpal Basu described Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's reply to the clarifications as "disappointing" adding that it did not address "serious concerns." Earlier, questioning the propriety of keeping Parliament in the dark about the various pacts, he sought the setting up of an all-party Special Parliamentary Committee to evolve a consensus on the nuclear deal and other agreements with the U.S. In what he described as his last major intervention the member, who is to retire soon, said India's goal for a nuclear weapon-free world was not captured in the new formulation of the nuclear world order. "We fundamentally differ that nuclear deterrent is any deterrent. We have no difference per se with the notion of the nuclear separation plan but the world should aim at creating a situation where nuclearisation does not take place."

Daily Times, 14 March 2006

Bush admin under fire over Pakistan (Khalid Hasan)

The Bush administration was accused on Monday of having given short shrift to Pakistan, which remains "the absolute key to the US war against Al Qaeda". Michael Scheuer, a retired Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) veteran and author of the acclaimed book 'Imperial Hubris', writes in the Washington Times that Pakistan is growing more important as US bases in Central Asia become problematic and its President, Gen Pervez Musharraf, is risking his life to help America by doing things that "harm Pakistan's national interests and stability" - such as sending the Pakistani army into the country's border provinces after Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Scheuer writes: "Faced with this reality what do the geniuses around the president do? They send him first to visit Afghan President Hamid Karzai, America's follower-less, anti-Pakistan satrap in Kabul; second, they send him to India - Pakistan's eternal and mortal enemy - where America's promises to support India's nuclear capability and make it a 'strategic ally'; and third they sneak the president into Pakistan, where he stays just long enough to lecture Gen Musharraf on how he must do more against Al Qaeda, and then departs, refusing to assist Pakistan's nuclear programme and leaving Gen Musharraf to face a coup-minded general staff seething over the net US payment for Pakistan's aid: domestic instability and a greatly strengthened India." The former head of the CIA's Osama Bin Laden unit observes sardonically that given what is happening, Bin Laden must fear that Muslims will begin to believe that the United States is his sponsor and that Washington is doing all it can to ensure Al Qaeda's victory. The foreign-policy performance of the Bush administration since Bin Laden's January 19 statement has been a "godsend" for Al Qaeda, he says.

Reuters, 14 March 2006

Rice urges Indonesian military reform (Sue Fleming)

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged Indonesia on Wednesday to make greater efforts to reform its armed forces, echoing calls from critics of Washington's decision to restore military ties last year. In an address to Indonesia's World Affairs Council, Rice stressed that a "reformed and effective" Indonesian military was in the interests of everyone in the region. "We look for continued progress toward greater accountability and complete reform," she said in prepared remarks at the end of a two-day visit to the world's most populous Muslim nation. "The greatest challenges now emerge more within states than between them and cannot be met by any one nation alone," said Rice, who promised U.S. help to reform the military. Security was tight at the speech venue where guests had been asked to arrive two hours in advance to clear various checks. Journalists were screened at least three times, a sniffer dog checked them and their bags and they were made to empty out their pockets and bags. The United States restored military ties with Indonesia last November and has come under strong criticism from some human rights groups who believe the move was premature and motivated more by wanting to get greater anti-terrorism cooperation than actual reforms by the military.

Daily Times, 14 March 2006

Poor security blocks investment: US (Rana Qaisar)

The United States said on Monday the security situation in Balochistan was "an impediment" to investment in Pakistan and opposed a gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan. "The security situation needs to be improved as it is an impediment to investment. Until there is an improvement, substantial investment is not possible," US Energy Secretary Samuel W Bodman told journalists when asked about foreign investment in a gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan. Bodman, who arrived in Islamabad for talks on US cooperation in Pakistan's energy sector, did not support the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, saying: "Our country has significant problems with Iran. They are working on nuclear weapons and we are trying to prevent it, so it is impossible to support a contractual agreement." Asked if the US would help Pakistan build a 1,000 MW nuclear power plant, he said: "We have developed a wide-ranging dialogue but it does not include cooperation in nuclear energy. Civil nuclear energy cooperation has not been discussed and it is not on my agenda."

Reuters, 14 March 2006

Rice says UN must send strong message to Iran (Sue Fleming)

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Tuesday she was confident the U.N. Security Council would

agree on a "very strong message" to send to Iran over its suspected nuclear weapons program. Rice, on a two-day trip to Indonesia, predicted there would be a strong international consensus over Iran in the U.N. Security Council, even though China and Russia have failed so far to support the text of a council statement that calls on Iran to suspend uranium enrichment the West believes is a cover for building a nuclear bomb. All 15 members of the Security Council will be briefed on Tuesday on a statement that Britain, France and the United States want the council to adopt in response to a report on Iran's programs by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency delivered last Wednesday. Rice said the United States, the Europeans, the Chinese and the Russians were still in discussion over what action to take against Iran in the council. "I am quite certain that when everyone has a chance to think about the importance of sending Iran a very strong message --- that it is time for Iran to heed the call (to cease its nuclear weapons plan)," said Rice.

The Hindu, 15 March 2006

Manmohan: not kowtowing to U.S.

Asserting that India was not "kowtowing" to the United States, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday said engagement with the U.S. did not mean that the country was surrendering its national interest. "It is in our national interest to engage with the U.S., which is a superpower. It thinks globally and acts globally. But we state our position. Last July while visiting Washington, I said that [the] invasion of Iraq was a great mistake," Dr. Singh told the Rajya Sabha. "Any notion that the new nuclear deal we have with the U.S. amounts to surrender of our independent thinking and autonomous decision-making process is totally misplaced," he said replying to a discussion on the working of the External Affairs Ministry. Urging the members to judge the United Progressive Alliance Government (UPA) by the "totality of results achieved by us and not by [the] changes that have come about," Dr. Singh said the Government was not "apologetic" about forging new relations with the U.S. that provided more space and greater elbow room for economic development and ensuring energy security.

The Hindu, 15 March 2006

India counters U.S. objections to Russia's decision to supply fuel

Dangling the carrot of "major" civilian nuclear imports before the United States in the event of a change in the laws there, India on Wednesday countered Washington's objections to Russia's decision to supply light enriched uranium (LEU) for the Tarapur plant. "The U.S. is aware of the urgent need for fuel for Tarapur," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson said when asked for his response to Washington's reservations about the Russian decision. "There is no violation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines and Russia has approached the group under the safety exception clause," he said. Senior officials told The Hindu that the Russian offer "really has no connection to our nuclear deal with the United States." In all interactions over the past year, Russia assured India that it would continue to provide LEU for Tarapur as and when required, an official said. This point was reiterated when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh went to Moscow last December and the final technical details of the transfer were sorted out in January. However, Russia waited till India and the U.S. reached agreement on March 2 before notifying the NSG of its decision.

Reuters, 15 March 2006

Taiwan opposition can't agree on US arms deal (Alice Hung)

Taiwan's opposition lawmakers are divided over whether, or what, to buy from a package of advanced weaponry offered by Washington, dashing hopes for a resolution to end the deadlocked deal any time soon. The main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), or the Nationalist Party, is widely expected to come up with its own answer to the deal before its chairman Ma Ying-jeou leaves for the United States, Taiwan's main ally and arms supplier, on Sunday. The delay has fueled worries in Washington that Taipei is not serious about its own defense. But the KMT said it did not feel any pressure. "My trip to the United States is not to explain our position on the weapon purchase," Ma told reporters on Wednesday. "It does not serve such a narrow purpose." The KMT, which favors closer ties with China, said many lawmakers wanted to shelve the proposal for now after President Chen Shui-bian scrapped a dormant but symbolic body and 15-year-old guidelines on unification with the mainland in February. The move triggered condemnation from China, which considers Taiwan part of its territory.

Washington Post, 15 March 2006

Rice Praises Indonesia As Model of 'Tolerance' (Ellen Nakashima)

Condoleezza Rice, in her first visit to Indonesia as secretary of state, praised its government Tuesday for setting an example of "moderation, tolerance and inclusiveness," and for urging officials in nearby military-ruled Burma to respect human rights. At a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, Rice defended the Bush administration's anti-terrorism policies, which have aroused criticism and violent protests in many Muslim countries, including Indonesia. "I understand that the United States has had to do things . . . that are not that popular in much of the world," she said. "We are fighting a very tough enemy, an enemy that has been felt here in Indonesia with bombings in Bali and Jakarta." She also suggested that the United States is sometimes misunderstood, and she stressed "how much the United States respects people who are of Islamic faith." Before the news conference, Rice visited an Islamic school, where she announced an \$8.5 million grant to develop a version of "Sesame Street" for Indonesia. Meanwhile, several hundred protesters from a radical Islamic group

rallied outside the heavily guarded U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, shouting slogans against Rice and the United States. The Bush administration has been eager to demonstrate its support for budding democracies, especially in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country.

New York Times, 15 March 2006

In Iran, Dissenting Voices Rise on Its Leaders' Nuclear Strategy (Micheal Slackman)

Just weeks ago, the Iranian government's combative approach toward building a nuclear program produced rare public displays of unity here. Now, while the top leaders remain resolute in their course, cracks are opening both inside and outside the circles of power over the issue. Some people in powerful positions have begun to insist that the confrontational tactics of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have been backfiring, making it harder instead of easier for Iran to develop a nuclear program. This week, the United Nations Security Council is meeting to take up the Iranian nuclear program. That referral and, perhaps more important, Iran's inability so far to win Russia's unequivocal support for its plans have empowered critics of Mr. Ahmadinejad, according to political analysts with close ties to the government. One senior Iranian official, who asked to remain anonymous because of the delicate nature of the issue, said: "I tell you, if what they were doing was working, we would say, 'Good.' " But, he added: "For 27 years after the revolution, America wanted to get Iran to the Security Council and America failed. In less than six months, Ahmadinejad did that." One month ago, the same official had said with a laugh that those who thought the hard-line approach was a bad choice were staying silent because it appeared to be succeeding. As usual in Iran, there are mixed signals, and the government does not always speak with the same voice. On Tuesday, both Mr. Ahmadinejad and the nation's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, insisted in public speeches that their country would never back down. At the same time, Iranian negotiators arrived in Moscow to resume talks - at Iran's request.

The Hindu, 16 March 2006

Gas pipeline: talks conclude (Atul Aneja)

India, Iran and Pakistan have concluded their first round of official-level talks in Teheran on the proposed 2,100-km Iran-India gas pipeline. Official sources told The Hindu that talks revolved around the project structure, feasibility and pricing. "As this was the first round, details were not discussed. Consequently, it would be premature to talk about the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding," the sources said. During talks on "project structure," the three sides discussed whether it would be appropriate to form a joint "overarching" authority that would steer the entire project. The other option would be country-specific, where each of them would construct the pipeline only within their territorial limits and then connect them together. The sources clarified that a detailed joint technical feasibility study on the project was yet to commence. The specific route, which this pipeline would take, would be covered by this study. In a written response to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dinsha Patel had said three possible routes - northern, central and southern - all passing through the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, were under consideration during the preparation of a detailed project report. Discussions on "pricing" revolved around tapping appropriate sources for financing the project. While Iran might not be inclined to seek international funding, India and Pakistan showed greater interest. According to current estimates, the pipeline could cost around \$7 billion. India's initial demand for gas from this project was in the range of 60 million cubic metres, while Pakistan at the outset could draw around 30 million cubic metres.

Reuters, 16 March 2006

Diplomacy must win to avoid Iran confrontation -US (Steve Holland)

An international diplomatic effort to force Iran to give up its nuclear ambitions must succeed "if confrontation is to be avoided," the White House said on Thursday in a new national security strategy. "We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran," said the document, which also described national security challenges in Iraq and across the Middle East as well as in Russia and China. The United States and its European allies are locked in a test of wills with Iran over suspicions that Tehran is trying to develop a nuclear weapons program despite its insistence that it merely wants atomic power for civilian use. "This diplomatic effort must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided," said the document without elaborating. President George W. Bush has insisted on a diplomatic outcome to the negotiations but has never taken the military option off the table, although experts believe U.S. involvement in the Iraq war is a limiting factor. The document cited other concerns about Iran: that it sponsors terrorism, threatens Israel, seeks to thwart Middle East peace, disrupts democracy in Iraq and denies freedom to Iranians. It said these can only be resolved if Iran makes the strategic decision to change its policies, open up its political system and allow freedom. "This is the ultimate goal of U.S. policy," the document said. "In the interim, we will continue to take all necessary measures to protect our national and economic security against the adverse effects of their bad conduct."

New York Times, 16 March 2006

Dubai Firm Verifies Plan on U.S. Ports

The Dubai-owned company that acquired several port terminals in major East Coast cities confirmed Wednesday that it would sell those operations to an unrelated American buyer, ending speculation about the ambiguity in its

statements that it would "transfer" the terminals to a "U.S. entity." Congressional critics of the acquisition said the company's statement appeared to end the matter. "It now seems clear that this deal has finally been scuttled," said Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, who opposed the deal. The company, DP World, said in a statement that it expected to complete the sale in four to six months. The company said it had begun preparing financial information about the terminals and soliciting bids. DP World last week closed its acquisition of the British company P & O Group, which ran some of the terminal operations in New York, Newark, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Miami and New Orleans.

Hindustan Times, 16 March 2006

US taking note of report on LTTE fund-raising

The Bush Administration has said it is taking seriously a Human Rights Watch report, which documents the LTTE's fund-raising outside Sri Lanka as also methods involved in the "collection". "We have designated the LTTE a long time ago as a foreign terrorist organisation and this was in part because of its activities outside of Sri Lanka raising funds," a senior US administration said. Washington is concerned about the report, released by the New York-based group on Wednesday, especially as it pertains to fund-raising among the community in the US. "US law prohibits the LTTE from collecting money in the United States and it is illegal for American citizens to provide money to the LTTE," the official said. "Our law enforcement agencies are aware of this and are on the lookout for these kinds of activity." According to the official, the US has called upon the LTTE to renounce "terrorist methods" in word and deed and stop practices such as recruiting child soldiers. "We urge it to participate sincerely in the peace process," the official added.

Hindustan Times, 16 March 2006

US holds reservations on Russian fuel for Tarapur (Sridhar Krishnaswamy)

Indicating its reservations on Russia's move to supply fuel for Tarapur nuclear reactor, the US has said that any such step should be taken after India fulfils its obligations under the historic Indo-US nuclear deal. "We recognise that... They (India) have need for fuel. And we think that deals to supply that fuel should move forward on the basis of a joint initiative, on the basis of steps that India will take that it has not yet taken," US State Department acting spokesman Adam Ereli told reporters in Washington referring to Indo-US nuclear deal. He was asked about the supply of nuclear fuel to India by Russia and if Washington had the details. "Well... And I'm not going to... I'm not in a position to go into the deal. I don't have the details. I haven't seen any sort of official statements of the deal.... President George W Bush has been very outspoken and I think visionary in trying to develop a framework within the international system to ensure the safe and secure supply of nuclear fuel through the Nuclear Suppliers Group" Ereli said. "And specifically with regard to India We have a very ... Forward-looking and really history-making initiative, joint initiative, to address the... India's nuclear programme, to separate the military from the civilian, and to bring India into compliance with NPT obligations and work based on that with a Nuclear Suppliers Group to give it access to the kind of fuel supplies that it's looking for," he said.

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Washington Post, 17 March 2006

Iran Agrees to Talk With U.S. About Iraq (Karl Vick)

A senior Iranian official said Thursday that Iran would enter into direct talks with the United States about Iraq, opening the way for the two countries to hold their first face-to-face discussion about Iran's western neighbor since shortly after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. "In the days to come we are going to designate people who are going to carry out these talks," Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said in an interview. "The important thing for us is an established government in Iraq and that security is restored." The White House welcomed the Iranian participation, which was solicited by the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, and urged by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a Shiite leader in Iraq with close ties to Tehran. Stephen J. Hadley, President Bush's national security adviser, said Khalilzad had been authorized to talk to the Iranians about their interference in Iraq "and make that concern known, recognizing that in the end of the day, it is not a negotiation." Hadley added that Iranian activity in Iraq "is giving comfort and, in some case, equipment to terrorists that are killing Iraqis and killing coalition forces. And that is what we have made very clear is unacceptable." Scott McClellan, the White House press secretary, emphasized that the talks would be limited to the situation in Iraq and would not touch on Iran's controversial nuclear program. "The nuclear issue is being discussed at the United Nations among diplomats of the Security Council," McClellan told reporters.

Daily Times, 17 March 2006

US for 'open and tolerant society' in Pakistan (Khalid Hasan)

The US says one of its national security policy objectives is for Pakistan to move towards building a "more open and tolerant society." The National Security Strategy of the United States of America made public on Thursday notes that the US has "emphasised the need for India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes." It points out that the Bush administration has "invested time and resources building strong bilateral relations with India and Pakistan," adding, "these strong relations then gave us leverage to play a constructive role when tensions in the region

became acute." "With Pakistan, our bilateral relations have been bolstered by Pakistan's choice to join the war against terror and move toward building a more open and tolerant society. The administration sees India's potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the twenty-first century and has worked hard to transform our relationship accordingly. Our involvement in this regional dispute looks first to concrete steps by India and Pakistan that can help defuse military confrontation."

Daily Times, 17 March 2006

US mulls pre-emptive action against Iran

The White House called Iran the greatest threat to the US on Thursday and warned that it will take pre-emptive military action if necessary to protect itself. "We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran," the White House said in a blueprint, the 'National Security Strategy' of the United States. "This diplomatic effort (Iran) must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided," said the document without elaborating. The document cited other concerns about Iran: that it sponsors terrorism, threatens Israel, seeks to thwart Middle East peace, disrupts democracy in Iraq and denies freedom to Iranians. It said that these can only be resolved if Iran makes the strategic decision to change its policies, open up its political system and allow freedom. "This is the ultimate goal of US policy," the document said. The document sought to draw a line between Iran's leaders and the Iranian people, saying that "our strategy is to block the threats posed by the regime while expanding our engagement and outreach to the people the regime is oppressing".

Reuters, 17 March 2006

US to China: Don't cling to "old ways" (Matt Spetalnick)

The White House pressed China for further reforms of what it called "discredited" trade policies and criticized its military buildup on Thursday in a hardening of the U.S. line on the Asia-Pacific power. The latest rebuke to China was contained in a new national security strategy, the first comprehensive update since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, that singled out longtime foes Iran and North Korea for the most strident language. But the White House also made clear it increasingly regarded China, which has coupled rapid economic growth with a major expansion of its military, as a challenge to U.S. interests. It issued a veiled threat, saying, "Our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities." Voicing concern about China's trade tactics, the document said Beijing was "expanding trade, but acting as if they can somehow 'lock up' energy supplies around the world or seek to direct markets rather than opening them up -- as if they can follow a mercantilism borrowed from a discredited era." President George W. Bush, under pressure to rein in the trade deficit with China, has promised to keep the heat on Beijing to float its currency. U.S. companies and lawmakers say the yuan is undervalued, making Chinese goods unfairly cheap.

Reuters, 17 March 2006

US says nuclear deal with India will take months (Carol Giacomo)

Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns predicted on Thursday it will take several months to complete action on a controversial U.S.-India civilian nuclear energy deal and warned anew that attaching conditions could scuttle the agreement. Burns, who initially predicted the U.S. Congress would act quickly when the deal was agreed upon in principle last July, acknowledged there are a "great number of members of Congress who need to have further discussion and further testimony" before they are prepared to vote. Under the pact, India would receive U.S. nuclear technology -- including reactors and nuclear fuel -- in return for separating its military and civil facilities and opening the civilian plants to international inspections. India has been barred from acquiring foreign nuclear technology for three decades because it refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and developed nuclear weapons. Burns, at a news briefing, expressed confidence the administration could successfully rebut experts who criticize the pact as weakening the international system that seeks to control the spread of nuclear technology. The administration, the Indian government and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have launched an aggressive campaign to sell the deal, which they insist is critical to a rapidly improving U.S.-India strategic relationship and advances U.S. security goals. In the past week, there have been numerous closed door meetings and briefings involving President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, other senior administration officials and key lawmakers. More are planned.

Hindustan Times, 18 March 2006

India should follow 'proper sequencing' on nuke accords: US

The US maintained its opposition to Russia's decision to supply uranium for the Tarapur atomic power plant. The Bush administration has said the "proper way" was to wait for the US to change its laws to facilitate implementation of the historic Indo-US nuclear deal and the Nuclear Suppliers Group to change its practices. "We think the proper sequencing would be that if India needs nuclear fuel for its reactors at Tarapur... The proper way to do this would be to have the US Congress act and hopefully change our laws, have the NSG, more particularly, act and change NSG practices, and then countries - US, France, Russia - would be free to engage, at that point, in civil nuclear trade with India," US Under Secretary of Political Affairs Nicholas Burns said on Thursday. He was briefing reporters shortly after the administration introduced a bill in the US Congress seeking amendment to the Atomic Energy Act to help implement the nuclear cooperation deal with India. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail

Fradkov, who is on a visit to India, on Thursday said his country's decision to supply fuel to Tarapur was within "international framework". "We are cooperating on this matter. We have served this issue within international framework and it does not contradict international commitments," he said. Acknowledging India's energy needs, Burns said "India needs energy. For an economy growing at eight to nine per cent a year, a billion people in the country, a rapidly expanding infrastructure, they need energy".

Reuters, 18 March 2006

US accuses Iran of "unhelpful activities" in Iraq

U.S. officials in Iraq on Friday again accused Iran of meddling in its neighbor's internal affairs, saying the Islamic Republic was carrying out "unhelpful activities" there. A U.S. embassy statement said Washington was "concerned about unhelpful Iranian activities in Iraq. These concerns are well known and we have talked about them." The statement was issued one day after Iran said it accepted a proposal by a leading Iraqi Shi'ite leader to open a dialogue with the United States on Iraq. Also on Thursday, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she believed U.S. talks with Iran on stabilizing Iraq would be "useful". Iranian officials had previously said Tehran was not interested in discussions before U.S. troops pulled out of Iraq. The United States, which is leading diplomatic efforts to isolate Iran over its nuclear ambitions, accuses Iran of contributing to instability in Iraq. Iran denies the charges. Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said Tehran accepted "the proposal to help resolve the problems in Iraq and establish an independent government there". But the embassy statement responding to his comments said: "The future of Iraq will not be decided by the United States, Iran or any other country. Iraqis will decide the future of Iraq."

The Hindu, 18 March 2006

No re-negotiation, says Burns

The Bush administration has said that it was against "re-negotiating" the "complex" nuclear deal with India. Citing India's good non-proliferation track record, U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns told presspersons that the pact would not enhance New Delhi's nuclear weapons programme or trigger an arms race in the region. Mr. Burns said though Congress members were welcome to give their suggestions, the administration would not like to re-negotiate the deal. "This is a complex agreement. To reopen it, we're probably at risk of never being able to achieve it again and to re-assemble it. So what we've said to members of Congress who have raised this with us is that we welcome all ideas. There may be ideas that do not require re-negotiation that may help to reinforce or strengthen this agreement. We're open to all of them. But we wish not to re-negotiate," he said. Maintaining the U.S.' opposition to Russia's decision to supply uranium for the Tarapur plant, Mr. Burns said the "proper way" was to wait for the U.S. to change its laws to facilitate implementation of the historic nuclear deal and the Nuclear Suppliers Group to change its practices.

Reuters, 18 March 2006

US court orders Sri Lankan released after 5 years

A U.S. court ordered the government on Friday to release a Sri Lankan who has been imprisoned for five years after he tried to enter America seeking asylum from alleged torture in his home country. Ahilan Nadarajah, a 25-year old member of the Tamil ethnic minority on the island nation, was tortured by government troops at his home in the Jaffna peninsula of northern Sri Lanka on suspicion that he was a member of the separatist Tamil Tigers group, according to court papers. He attempted to enter the United States illegally in 2001, and has been detained ever since without being charged with any crime. "We conclude that the general detention statutes relied upon by the government do not authorize indefinite detention," Judge Sidney Thomas wrote for a three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. "When examined under the analysis prescribed by the Supreme Court, Nadarajah's detention is unreasonable, unjustified, and in violation of federal law." The decision cited an earlier Supreme Court ruling finding that detention for a period of six months is permissible in such cases only if removal is soon likely. "A detention of nearly five years -- ten times the amount of time the Supreme Court has considered acceptable absent a special showing -- is plainly unreasonable under any measure," the judge wrote. A 2002 truce halted two decades of civil war in Sri Lanka and left the Tamil Tigers in control of the Tamil-dominated north and east.

Reuters, 18 March 2006

Japan, Australia and US urge constructive China

The United States, Japan and Australia said on Saturday that China had a constructive role to play in the Asia-Pacific and encouraged the emerging superpower to "pull its weight" as a regional and global player. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso and Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer also called on North Korea to return to six-party nuclear talks and voiced grave concerns about Iran's nuclear program. But China appeared to be the key focus for the inaugural Trilateral Security Dialogue, held at a naval base in Sydney, with Rice expressing concern ahead of the meeting over the rise of the Asian giant and in particular its military build-up. "We welcomed China's constructive engagement in the region and concurred on the value of enhanced cooperation with other parties such as ASEAN and the Republic of (South) Korea," the three ministers said in a statement after the talks. But Downer said it was important that Beijing did not feel Japan,

Australia and the United States were "ganging up" on it, and the three nations just wanted to make sure the economic and political growth of China worked to benefit the region."We want China to pull its weight as a good regional participant, an example of that is on North Korea," Downer told reporters after the meeting."It's not for China to feel we're ganging up on China ... We certainly don't have a policy of ... trying to constrain China or working with other countries against Chinese interests or anything like that."

The Washington Post, 20 March, 2006

Rice Condemns Burma as Oppressive Holdout in Asia

Jakarta, March 19: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sharply criticized Burma's military government Wednesday for denying the aspirations of its people. She described it as an oppressive holdout in a region moving increasingly toward democracy. Speaking during the second day of a visit to Indonesia, Rice condemned Burma's rulers for bankrupting their once vibrant economy and shuttering universities that had previously attracted top scholars. Her tough remarks, which echoed earlier administration criticisms, capped an address surveying the state of U.S. relations with countries across Southeast Asia...

The New York Times, 20 March, 2006

Grisly Discovery Reopens Old Wounds in Village in India

Pandarwada, March 19: One afternoon in March 2002, amid one of the worst outbreaks of sectarian violence in recent Indian history, 26 Muslim men and women were hacked to death by a mob of Hindu hard-liners as others hid in the wheat fields behind their homes in this dusty village. The victims' relatives saw the horror unfold. The police removed the bodies, and the people of Pandarwada, in the western state of Gujarat, never again saw their dead. Nor, in the absence of burials, could they properly mourn. Though DNA tests were ordered on several skulls and bones found in December in an isolated garbage dump near here, there seems little doubt that the bones are the remains of the villagers massacred four years ago...

The Hindu, 21 March, 2006

Indo-US nuclear deal is in Washington's interest: Bush

Washington, March 21: US President George W Bush has said that it is in America's interest to work out the civilian nuclear deal with India and develop the "important relationship" with New Delhi by setting aside cold-war era tensions. Bush also said that it was a "positive development" for India that Washington was a friend of Islamabad and likewise for Pakistan that America was a friend of India. Speaking about the nuclear deal, Bush said it was a "controversial decision" as it "basically flies in the face of Cold War attitudes, as well as arms control thinking", but emphasised the move would help reduce the dependence on fossil fuels...

Hindustan Times, 21 March, 2006

Pak hasn't given up hope on nuclear deal with US

Washington, March 20: Despite the US's emphatic rejection of its demand for a copycat nuke deal, Pakistan is still not reconciled to the India-specific pact. It has renewed its campaign on this issue in Washington's corridors of power, asserting that US policy "should not be leaning so heavily on one side". Close on the heels of the introduction of legislation on the Indo-US deal in Congress, Pakistani Ambassador Jehangir Karamat has held a meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher on this issue...

The Washington Post, 21 March, 2006

Nunn Urges Congress to Set Conditions on U.S.-India Nuclear Pact

Washington, March 20: In a setback for the administration's efforts to win approval of a landmark nuclear pact with India, former senator Sam Nunn said yesterday that he has serious concerns the deal would harm the "United States' vital interest" in preventing nuclear proliferation and urged Congress to set conditions for its support. "Congress has a duty to look at the broader framework," Nunn, a moderate and highly respected Georgia Democrat who still has broad influence in both parties on proliferation and military matters, said in an interview. "If I were still in Congress, I would be sceptical and looking at conditions that could be attached."...

The Hindu, 22 March, 2006

Nuclear deal is in our interest: Bush

Washington: United States President George Bush has said it was in America's interest to work out the civilian nuclear deal with India and develop the "important relationship" by setting aside Cold-War era tensions. Mr. Bush also said it was a "positive development" for India that Washington was a friend of Islamabad and likewise for Pakistan that America was a friend of India...

Dawn, 22 March, 2006

US military's relief operations end

Islamabad, March 21: The chairman, United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, on Tuesday announced the conclusion of the longest-ever US military disaster relief operations in Pakistan. The

announcement formally came at a press conference amidst strict security measures at the Islamabad Heliport. The conference was held after the four-star general had visited the earthquake-affected areas of Pakistan. He was accompanied by Director Federal Relief Commission Maj Gen Farooq Ahmad Khan and Rear Admiral Michael LeFever, Commander; US Disaster Assistance Centre. The visit gave General Peter Pace the opportunity to review the US Disaster Assistance Centre efforts and accomplishments ...

The Hindu, 22 March, 2006

Kissinger hails pact

Washington, March 21: The India-U.S. nuclear deal "promises to make a seminal contribution to international peace and prosperity," according to the former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Welcoming the agreement as "an unprecedented level of cooperation and interdependence between the two powers," he said: "In a period preoccupied with concerns over terrorism and the potential clash of civilisations, the emerging cooperation between the two great democracies, India and the U.S., introduces a positive and hopeful perspective." ...

Hindustan Times, 22 March, 2006

India, Pakistan making progress on J&K: US

Washington, March 21: The US has said that India and Pakistan were making good progress on the Kashmir issue. In an exclusive interview to ANI, Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia said that New Delhi and Islamabad had made some visible progress on the contentious issue and were taking forward the Composite Dialogue process in a very careful manner... On being asked about the option of self-governance, that has been touted as a probable solution to the issue, Boucher said he did not want to focus on individual ideas. He said that the US viewed its role in the Kashmir dispute as that of a friend for both countries. The issue was bilateral and had to be solved by India and Pakistan only ...

Daily Times, 22 March, 2006

Pak-US trade will grow: Bush

Washington, March 21: US President George W Bush has said the US is "trying to negotiate" an investment treaty with Pakistan, "with the hopes of being able to eventually develop more trade with Pakistan". He said that he believed that trade helps nations develop stability, and that "prosperity is achieved through trade". In a question-and-answer session following his address to the Cleveland Club, Ohio, Bush said it was "very important" for the US "to stay engaged with Pakistan and encourage them"...

Hindustan Times, 23 March, 2006

US troops to leave Pak by March 31: Official

Islamabad, March 22: US soldiers, who helped in rescue and rehabilitation work in Pakistan and PoK after last year's massive earthquake, would leave by month-end, a senior US military official has said. Relief and rehabilitation operation of US marines in earthquake affected areas was coming to an end and all US troops who participated in the massive operation will leave Pakistan by March 31 in their Chinook helicopters, Gen Peter Pace, Chairman US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters on Tuesday. He was speaking after touring the quake-affected areas with US Rear Admiral Michael Lefever, Commander US Disaster Assistance Center US ambassador Ryan C Crocker and Pakistan's Relief Commissioner Maj Gen Farooq...

Hindustan Times, 23 March, 2006

Nuke deal with India positive for American national interest: Burns

Washington, March 22: Asserting that the nuclear deal with India was "positive" for America's national interests, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns on Wednesday said there was "compelling group" of nations who have expressed support for the initiative. In a press meet at the Washington Foreign Press Centre, Burns disclosed that the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher along with Stephen Rademaker, acting Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Security and Non-Proliferation will be briefing the Nuclear Suppliers Group in Vienna tomorrow on the civilian nuclear arrangement ...

Dawn, 23 March, 2006

Afghan FM disputes US charges against Iran

Washington, March 22: Afghanistan's outgoing foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah said on Tuesday that his country did not share Washington's concerns about Iran as a terrorist threat, saying Kabul has benefited from Tehran's aid. In answer to a question at a press conference about alleged evidence of Iranian terrorism in Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah said: "We have established good neighbourly relations with almost all our neighbouring countries..."

Dawn, 23 March, 2006

Pakistan shouldn't worry, says US

Washington, March 22: As the Bush administration sent two assistant secretaries of state on Wednesday to Vienna to garner support for the Indo-US nuclear agreement, a senior official said in Washington that the deal should not be a cause of concern for Pakistan. Apart from efforts to muster international support for the deal, the United States is running an aggressive campaign at home to convince sceptical US lawmakers of the merits of the plan, put forward by President George Bush. In Washington, under secretary of State Nicholas Burns, who was also the chief US negotiator for the nuclear deal, assured Islamabad that America's nuclear cooperation should not be a cause of concern for Pakistan...

Daily Times, 23 March, 2006

China warns against flexible use of US troops in Northeast Asia

Seoul, March 22: China's top envoy to South Korea expressed concern Wednesday that US troops based here could be deployed elsewhere in the region under a new Seoul-Washington accord. Chinese Ambassador Ning Fukui told a security forum that the role of some 32,000 US troops based in the peninsula must be limited to providing security for South Korea...

The Frontier Post, 25 March, 2006

US: War on terror will last for years

Ankara, March 24: The war on terror will continue long after Iraq and Afghanistan are stable, Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told military officials from around the world Friday. Speaking at the Global Terrorism and International Cooperation Symposium, Pace called for patience and collaboration, repeating US assertions that it will be a long campaign. "Iraq and Afghanistan will over time become stable," he said in a keynote address. "But the war on terror will continue long after Iraq and Afghanistan have had success in standing up their own governments." Pace also told the crowd that military action alone will not be enough. Economic growth, good education systems and solid governments also are necessary to quell terrorism ...

Dawn, 25 March, 2006

US move to affect Pakistani workers

Washington, March 24: Plans to criminalize undocumented workers in the US will also affect thousands of Pakistanis working in the service industry in major American cities. The plans have already caused widespread protests by civil rights activists who opposed a bill passed last year by the House of Representatives that would make it a felony to be in the US illegally. The Bush administration supported the bill, but also called for broader reforms in anticipation that the Senate would move beyond enforcement only. The Senate is scheduled to debate the issue next week. An estimated 11.5 million people are living in the US illegally, working mostly in the agriculture sector and the construction and service industries...

Daily Times, March 25, 2006

US air relief efforts wind down in quake-hit areas

Islamabad, March 24: Two more Chinook helicopters departed from Pakistan as reconstruction efforts turn to land transport to deliver reconstruction materials, a US Embassy statement said on Friday. Currently, six US CH-47 Chinooks are in Pakistan and will operate until March 31. At the beginning of relief efforts in October, up to 21 US helicopters were delivering supplies. As relief efforts progressed, the US matched the airlift capacity with humanitarian assistance requirements and reduced the number of helicopters to 12 through the winter months and the rainy season. With the arrival of spring, the build-up of supplies at distribution centres and with the reopening of roads to the affected areas, the US helicopters were no longer essential to relief operation...

Daily Times, March 25, 2006

Japan, US split over military base relocation costs

Tokyo, March 24: Japan and the United States are divided over how much Tokyo should pay to move US Marines to Guam from the Japanese island of Okinawa, Japan's foreign minister said on Friday, as the two allies struggled to wrap up a plan on relocating US troops by an end-March deadline. Negotiators meeting in Tokyo are trying to finalise details of a plan to reorganise the approximately 50,000 US military personnel in Japan by the end of the month. But squabbling over the funding and opposition from Japanese communities worried about noise, crime and accidents associated with the US bases threaten to delay finalising the deal, which was agreed upon last October.

The New York Times, 26 March, 2006

American gets 9 years for Okinawa rapes

Japan, March 25: An American civilian employee at the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa was sentenced to nine years in prison for raping two women, according to the Naha District Court. The worker, Dag A. Thompson, 36, reportedly a former marine who sold cars at the base, was sentenced for rapes in 1998 and 2004...

The Hindu, 26 March, 2006

More intake in U.S. graduate schools

Washington, March 25: Reversing the declining trend due to post-9/11 visa restrictions, intake of foreign students in the U.S. graduate schools has increased by 11 per cent this year with a considerable number of Indian and Chinese students enrolling in the colleges here. According to the Council of Graduate Schools, the applications from foreign students have increased by 11 per cent in 2006. The report released by the Washington-based Council said large gains in the volume of applications have been from India (23 per cent) followed by China (21 per cent). On an annual basis, both India and China make up for the largest foreign student population in the U.S. with one study pegging the Indian numbers at 85,000...

Dawn, 26 March, 2006

Bush Sr views post-quake recovery plan

United Nations, March 25: George Bush Sr on Friday met UN officials on the launch of the recovery phase in areas of Pakistan devastated by the October 2005 earthquake. Mr Bush is a special UN envoy for the South Asia earthquake. "They highlighted the importance of ensuring continued support and funding during this critical transition period, in order to build upon the success of the relief phase," a UN spokesman said of the meeting, which was attended by emergency relief coordinator Jan Egeland and UNDP administrator Kemal Dervis...

Hindustan Times, 27 March, 2006

NRIs campaign to drum up support for nuclear deal

Washington, March 26: The Indian Americans are climbing up Capitol Hill for the nuke deal. It is billed as one of the biggest mobilisation efforts by the 2-million-strong community in recent years. A host of NRI/PIO bodies have plunged into an all-out campaign to drum up support for the Indo-US nuclear deal even as the Senate and the House committees prepare to deliberate on the recently introduced bill. The organizations range from the well-connected AAPI (American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin) to a string of broad-based conglomerates such as the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) and the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO)...

Dawn, 27 March, 2006

Cancellation of senator's visa stirs row in US

Washington, March 26: The revoking of a US visa issued to a Baloch senator has become a major human rights issue in the United States where the media as well as rights groups are urging the Bush administration to review its decision. A report published on Saturday in the Washington Post indicated that Mr. Baloch's visa was apparently revoked to please the Pakistani government because the senator was a known critic of Islamabad's policy. Mr. Baloch was invited by the State Department last year to attend a programme on government accountability scheduled for March 27 and was even issued a US visa. But US officials recently told Mr. Baloch that his invitation has been cancelled and his visa revoked because of a "recent withdrawal in funding" which had forced the programme to be scaled back...

Hindustan Times, 27 March, 2006

Foreign Secretary, ministers to visit US

Washington, March 26: Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and several Union Ministers are scheduled to visit the United States in the coming weeks, reflecting the importance the two countries are attaching to bilateral relations after they concluded a landmark deal on civilian nuclear energy cooperation. The Foreign Secretary, who will be in Washington from March 28-31, will hold bilateral discussions with his US counterpart, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns...

The New York Times, 27 March, 2006

Two Senators Leaving China in Mild Dispute

Hong Kong, March 26: After a weeklong trip to China, two senators who have been pushing Chinese leaders to devalue their nation's currency say they do not agree on how much progress China is making. The split indicates that they are less likely to press for a Senate vote on their trade bill this week. Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, and Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, have introduced legislation that would impose a 27.5 percent tariff on all American imports from China in two years unless officials in Beijing allowed "substantial" appreciation in the exchange value of their currency, the Yuan...

The Hindu, 29 March, 2006

No going back on deal, says Burns

Washington, March 28: On the eve of crucial meetings on the Capitol Hill on the nuclear deal with India, the Bush administration said it was open to ideas and suggestions from Congress members on the agreement provided they were not deal-breakers requiring re-negotiations. It also expressed a willingness to show flexibility on the '123 agreement,' which is an outline of a final bilateral civil nuclear deal. Under-Secretary of State for Political

Affairs Nicholas Burns will take up the agreement with the visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran this week...

Hindustan Times, 29 March, 2006

Saran in US to clear doubts on N-deal

New Delhi, March 28: In the midst of US Congress' debate on Indo-US civil nuclear deal, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran will be in Washington from Thursday. The Foreign Secretary will seek to clear the doubts that several American lawmakers have with regard to the agreement besides holding talks with Bush Administration officials. Saran will meet Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns to discuss next steps in civil nuclear cooperation, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters in New Delhi...

The Washington Post, 29 March, 2006

U.S. Revokes Visa of Pakistani Senator

Washington, March 28: The Bush administration has withdrawn an invitation to a Pakistani lawmaker and a prominent critic of President Pervez Musharraf who was to arrive in the United States today as a guest of the State Department, setting off charges that the action came at the behest of the Pakistani government. Sana Ullah Baloch, who had been invited by the State Department last year and issued a visa, was told recently by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad that he could not attend a State Department-sponsored program on accountability in government and business and that a visa he had already received had been revoked...

The Washington Post, 29 March, 2006

Rice Condemns Burma as Oppressive Holdout in Asia

Jakarta, March 28: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sharply criticized Burma's military government Wednesday for denying the aspirations of its people. She described it as an oppressive holdout in a region moving increasingly toward democracy. Speaking during the second day of a visit to Indonesia, Rice condemned Burma's rulers for bankrupting their once vibrant economy and shuttering universities that had previously attracted top scholars...

The Washington Post, 29 March, 2006

U.S. Revokes Visa of Pakistani Senator

Washington, March 29: Musharraf Critic Was to Be State Dept. Guest. The Bush administration has withdrawn an invitation to a Pakistani lawmaker and a prominent critic of President Pervez Musharraf who was to arrive in the United States today as a guest of the State Department, setting off charges that the action came at the behest of the Pakistani government. Sana Ullah Baloch, who had been invited by the State Department last year and issued a visa, was told recently by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad that he could not attend a State Department-sponsored program on accountability in government and business and that a visa he had already received had been revoked...

The Hindu, 30 March, 2006

It is for U.S. to take deal forward: Manmohan

New Delhi, March 29: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Wednesday that the nuclear deal with the United States was before that country's Congress and the Bush administration had to secure its approval. Speaking to presspersons on the sidelines of an official function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, he said Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran was on a "normal visit" to Washington. Dr. Singh's comments come at a time when the Bush administration is engaged in convincing influential members of Congress that the nuclear agreement is in America's interest...

The Daily Times, March 30, 2006

Six US state senators visiting Pakistan

Washington, March 29: A group of six bipartisan state senators from across the country is leaving for Pakistan in the first week of April. The group sponsored by the Department of State is part of an exchange programme involving young political leaders. The delegation will have a variety of meetings, including meetings with leaders of the major political parties, business groups, non-governmental organizations, journalists and intellectuals. The state senators will call on President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, and are also scheduled to visit some earthquake-hit areas in Azad Kashmir...

Hindustan Times, 30 March, 2006

US wants more of its students in India

New Delhi, March 29: Observing that there was an "imbalance" in educational exchange with India, US today favoured more of its students coming to India to study. "There is a great educational relationship between the two countries. While the positive side is that there are about 80,000 Indian students in our country, the negative aspect is that only 1000 US students are studying in India," US Ambassador David Mulford said in New Delhi... Mulford said Indo-American relations have blossomed into a "major strategic relationship", especially after US

President George Bush's visit...

The Dawn, 30 March 2006

'US, Pakistan to continue fight against terror'

Washington, March 29: Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Peter Pace, who was in Islamabad last week, is believed to have discussed various proposals with his Pakistani counterparts for effectively combating Taliban and Al Qaeda supporters operating along the Pakistan-Afghan border, US officials said... The US general, who visited Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey last week, to consult America's allies on the war against terror also praised the Pakistan Army for the role it played in dealing with the aftermath of the Oct 8 earthquake... Gen Pace said that Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were working diligently to reduce transit of terrorists across their borders. The general did not say what specific proposals he discussed with the Pakistani military but described the talks as "a good, open dialogue amongst our military folks."...

The Hindu, 31 March, 2006

Saran, Rice discuss nuclear deal

Washington, March 30: The implementation of the historic India-U.S. civilian nuclear deal came up during discussions Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran had with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice here. The meeting with Rice on Wednesday followed a working lunch Mr. Saran had with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, at which they discussed "all bilateral issues" with a focus on the civilian nuclear agreement, especially on the kind of steps necessary to take it further, sources said...

The Hindu, 31 March, 2006

U.S. defends civilian nuclear deal with India

Washington, March 30: The United States on Thursday defended the civilian nuclear deal with India, saying that it materialised only after New Delhi's commitment to meet non-proliferation goals. As Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran was holding crucial talks with lawmakers and officials, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack countered the remarks made by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier that the deal came at a wrong time, when international efforts were for curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions...

Hindustan Times, 30 March, 2006

US seeks SAARC observer status

Dhaka, March 30: The United States has sought observer status of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Gastright, who is due here on a three-day official visit from on Thursday, is expected to communicate the request formally to Bangladesh, the current chair of SAARC. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said Bangladesh has received the request from the USA for observer status of SAARC. The USA in its written communication to the SAARC secretariat last week has expressed its eagerness to get the observer status...

The Daily Times, March 30, 2006

US, Australian troops wind up quake ops

Islamabad, March30: US and Australian military personnel helping with earthquake relief in Pakistan said farewell on Thursday after nearly six months of life-saving helicopter airlifts. At a ceremony in a massive hangar at the Qasim Army Aviation Base in Rawalpindi, US and Pakistani officials exchanged gifts and compliments before the official end of the mission on Friday. Against the backdrop of a giant US Chinook helicopter and an Australian Black Hawk, American ambassador Ryan C Crocker said the scale of the mercy mission following the October 8 earthquake was unprecedented...